

BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



WILLIAM BARTON ROGERS MIDDLE SCHOOL

January 18, 2011

W. CORBETT COUTTS
PRINCIPAL

Amy Ryan
President
Boston Public Library
700 Boylston Street
Boston, MA 02116

Dear Ms. Ryan:

Mrs. Sarah Ann Shaw is a dear friend and the mother of one of my best friends. When I called her a few weeks ago "in a tizzy," she gave me your name and address and suggested that I contact you. I work as the student development counselor at the Rogers Middle School, and offered to write on behalf of our students and teachers because I was so shocked and so disturbed at the level of maturity of one of the books a 12-year old seventh grader checked out of the Hyde Park branch library (sample pages attached), which is across the street from our school.

Independent reading is a crucial component of Boston's English Language Arts curriculum. Students are learning the importance of reading and are given an opportunity to have a say in the choice of novel. While the teachers recognize the importance of choosing books that have a high interest level and that represent urban culture in some way, some books are simply inappropriate for young readers (11 - 15 years old in the case of our students). Several such books were checked out of the Young Adult section in the weeks before the Christmas holidays and the teacher, Ms. Jennifer Gavin, became aware when she noticed that students were passing one of the books around. The book, entitled Thug-A-Licious: an urban erotic tale by Noire, is sexually explicit and graphic. Teachers have taken their students for a tour of the library and have pointed out the Young Adult section; Ms. Gavin contacted one of the staff of the Hyde Park branch and he confirmed that the book had been filed in that section.

While several teachers cautioned that my letter might be seen as one seeking censorship, I am asking only that such books be moved to the Adult section, out of the reach of young children. If Thug-A-Licious were a movie, it would certainly be rated X/NC-17. Students under the age of 18 therefore should not be able to access it.

Our teachers will continue to use BPL as a resource for our students but we look to you to ask that it be made a safe resource.

Please feel free to call me, or Ms. Jen Gavin, if you have any questions. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Judith Sanford-Harris
Judith Sanford-Harris, Ph.D.
Student Development Counselor